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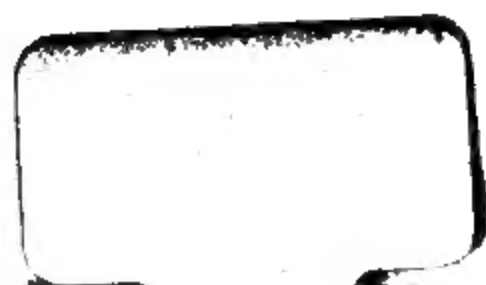
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THREE DAYS



THREE DAYS

BY

ROSE MACAULAY

AUTHOR OF "THE TWO BLIND COUNTRIES,"
"WHAT NOT," ETC.

PANY.

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DEDICATORY

THE lovely and comic earth, when you go by,
Waves wide hands full of comic and lovely things,
Seeking to hold the praise of your fitting eye.

Nine days' wonders across your path she flings;
—Beech woods break as you pass to a forest fire;
A sweet Gregorian chant the cuckoo sings;

Peacocks flaunt the tails of a child's desire;
Apples leap from a dish and dance a jig;
Ghosts walk with you, who never were called a liar.

In fields you tread the thistle shall bear a fig;
To walk with you is to travel a wizard land;
You would come to Australia, or Hell, were you to dig.

Curious stones twist slipping about your hand—
Cat's-eye, lapis, onyx, chalcedony,
Winking with shadowy lights, or beaming bland,

Or blue as night, or green as the rock-green sea,
Or pink like a rose, or mild as the moon's rays—
I cannot tell the curious stones they be.

The lovely and witty earth before you lays
(Seeking to snare your laughter or your praise)
Rich jests, strange stones, and all things that amaze.

TO
N. G. R. S.
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
MANY OF THEM

SOME of these poems have appeared in the
"Westminster Gazette," "Poetry and Drama,"
"The New Statesman," and "New Paths."
I have to thank the Editors for permission to
reprint them.

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THREE DAYS

YESTERDAY

PICNIC

JULY 1917

WE lay and ate sweet hurt-berries
In the bracken of Hurt Wood.
Like a quire of singers singing low
The dark pines stood.

Behind us climbed the Surrey hills,
Wild, wild in greenery;
At our feet the downs of Sussex broke
To an unseen sea.

And life was bound in a still ring,
Drowsy, and quiet, and sweet . . .
When heavily up the south-east wind
The great guns beat.

We did not wince, we did not weep,
We did not curse or pray;
We drowsily heard, and someone said,
"They sound clear to-day."

PICNIC, JULY 1917

We did not shake with pity and pain,
Or sicken and blanch white.
We said, "If the wind's from over there
There'll be rain to-night."

* * * * *

Once pity we knew, and rage we knew,
And pain we knew, too well,
As we stared and peered dizzily
Through the gates of hell.

But now hell's gates are an old tale;
Remote the anguish seems;
The guns are muffled and far away,
Dreams within dreams.

And far and far are Flanders mud,
And the pain of Picardy;
And the blood that runs there runs beyond
The wide waste sea.

We are shut about by guarding walls:
(We have built them lest we run
Mad from dreaming of naked fear
And of black things done.)

We are ringed all round by guarding walls,
So high, they shut the view.
Not all the guns that shatter the world
Can quite break through.

* * * * *

PICNIC, JULY 1917

Oh, guns of France, oh, guns of France,
Be still, you crash in vain. . . .
Heavily up the south wind throb
Dull dreams of pain, . . .

Be still, be still, south wind, lest your
Blowing should bring the rain. . . .
We'll lie very quiet on Hurt Hill,
And sleep once again.

Oh, we'll lie quite still, nor listen nor look,
While the earth's bounds reel and shake,
Lest, battered too long, our walls and we
Should break . . . should break. . . .

ALL SOULS' DAY

1916

THE men are black as the cursèd night,
Or brown as *café au lait*,
Or golden amber, like pale sherry,
Or blind to the blowing day,
Or, for some ill deed they have wrought,
Condemned to limp away.

They talk with the tongues of aliens;
They shake in the keen breeze.
(The keen breeze searches the chill bones
Of Cambridge men, not these,
Of Cambridge men keeping their terms
In trenches overseas;
And of colder Cambridge men who lie
In No Man's Land, at ease.)

* * * * *

Like thieves about the gray city
The brown men creep, afraid,
Creep down St. Edward's passage way,
And lurk there, in the shade,
As if they found no room to walk
To-day, in King's Parade.

ALL SOULS' DAY, 1916

Yesterday was All Hallows',
And bright with the saints' beams.
To-day the leaves blow down, blow down,
Through tears the sun gleams.
And O, to-day the young men come,
Washed on a drift of dreams.

There's a light whisper of laughter
Down Trinity Street,
A flutter of gowns in the thronged Cury,
And on Pease Hill beat,
Like waves striking a mist-drowned shore,
An army of feet.

Cambridge town is carried and stormed,
And the black, lame, and blind,
Creep perplexed through the blithe city
That is grown gay and unkind. . . .

• • • • •

The strange tide will ebb again
Before the dawn star,
Ebb and drift, whispering
Out beyond the bar,
Back to the shores (more near than France)
Where the Cambridge men are.

The blacks will walk the empty streets,
Securely at their ease;

ALL SOULS' DAY, 1916

They'll walk, gibbering black men's speech,
 'Twixt the Great Gate and Caius.
But ever they'll pale, as black men pale,
 A-wilting in the breeze,
To think how Cambridge called her own
 From beyond the bitter seas.

THE SHADOW

THERE was a Shadow on the moon; I saw it poise
and tilt, and go
Its lonely way, and so I know that the blue velvet night
will soon
Blaze loud and bright, as if the stars were crashing right
into the town,
And tumbling streets and houses down, and smashing
people like wine-jars. . . .

Fear wakes:

What then?

Strayed shadow of the Fear that breaks

The world's young men.

Bright fingers point all round the sky, they point and grope
and cannot find.

(God's hand, you'd think, and he gone blind.) . . . The
queer white faces twist and cry.

Last time they came they messed our square, and left it a
hot rubbish-heap,

With people sunk in it so deep, you could not even hear
them swear.

Fire blinds.

What then?

Pale shadow of the Pain that grinds

The world's young men.

THE SHADOW

The weak blood running down the street, oh, does it run
like fire, like wine?

Are the spilt brains so keen, so fine, crushed limbs so swift,
dead dreams so sweet?

There is a Plain where limbs and dreams and brains to set
the world a-fire

Lie tossed in sodden heaps of mire. . . . Crash! To-night's
show begins, it seems.

Death . . . Well,

What then?

Rim of the shadow of the Hell

Of the world's young men.

LADY DAY

1917

THE world is a tent from the driving winds
And the skies' wild, keen blue,
But wherever its sodden walls are rent
The Sons of God break through;
Break singing through, as the winds of March
Lift a pennoned lance and run
Tilting between the pale armies
Of beech-stems in the sun.
So tilt, so run the Sons of God,
And set the world a-dance
With a red banner of anarchy,
And a shivering, piercing lance
That breaks, that breaks . . . Oh pity and shame
That the wild, the free, the brave,
Who spring to the earth on Lady Day,
Should break like a breaking wave,
In passion and pain on a dark Friday,
With none to let or save.

If this be the bitter death of hope,
And the weary end of the way,
Who will run with the singing winds
That awake on Lady Day

LADY DAY, 1917

When the bloomy shadows race the clouds,
And the palms and the catkins dance,
If God, who comes like a song on the wind,
Must die, like a blind, missed chance?
If all we get of that fierce battle
Is the shaft of a broken lance?

* * * * *

The tent is shaken and rent. . . . Oh, a wind
Drives from the wild, keen blue,
And God, the Lord God of anarchy,
Breaks through. . . .

NEW YEAR

1918

WHATEVER the year brings, he brings nothing new,
For time, caught on the ancient wheel of change,
Spins round, and round, and round; and nothing is strange,
Or shall amaze
Mankind, in whom the heritage of all days
Stirs suddenly, as dreams half remembered do.
Whatever the year brings, he brings nothing new.

Pale, pale he stands,
Carrying world-old gifts in his cold hands—
Winds, and the sky's keen blue
Woods, and the wild cuckoo,
Lovers, and loveliness, and death, and life.
Does he hold Peace, the derelict babe of strife
And of wan penury?
Will she ride in on the wash of the storming sea,
Be dropped at last by its ebb on the trampled sands,
To lie there helplessly?
War's orphan, she,
And ungrown mother of wars yet to be,
She smiles and croons for a space between these two.
Whatever the year brings, he brings nothing new.

NEW YEAR, 1918

Dreams and desires and hopes does the year hold.
Bad and good, tinsel and gold,
Lying and true,
One and all they are old, so old,
They were dreamt and desired and told
By the first men swinging in trees by strong tails.
Not till the last man fails,
And the sun's fire pales,
Shall the embers of these flaming dreams be cold.
Whatever the year brings, he brings nothing new.

Turn, turn the page!
It turns, and we, and the squirrel in his cage,
And the sun, and the moon, and the moon's salt tide;
And the earth turns too.
As flies on the rim of a wheel we ride
From age round to age;
And the dreams and the toys which make our pride
Are an old heritage,
Worn properties from some primeval stage
All curtained now from view . . .
Whatever the year brings, he brings nothing new.

Go through the door.
You shall find nothing that has not been before,
Nothing so bitter it will not be once more.
All this our sad estate was known of yore,
In old worlds red with pain,
Borne by hearts sullen and sick as ours, through

NEW YEAR, 1918

Desperate, forgotten, other winters, when
 Tears fell, and hopes, and men,
And crowns, and cities, and blood, on a trampled plain,
And nations, and honour, and God, and always rain. . . .
And honour and hope and God rose up again,
 And like trees nations grew . . .
Whatever the year brings, he brings nothing new.

Should some year suddenly bring something new,
We should grope as lost children, without a clue.
We should drift all amazed through such a queer
 And unimagined year.
Riding uncharted seas, a derelict crew,
Whistling in vain for the old winds that blew
From the old skies, we should seek far and near
 Some mark by which to steer,
And some known port, that we might sail thereto.
 Black nightmare and blind fear
 Shall seize and hold him who
In some year suddenly finds something new.

SANITY

WHEN the world's rims crumbled, and its walls fell
down,

So raked were they, so beaten, by hell's long guns,
And the new walls that rose were as walls round asylums,
Pressing, bald and blind, about the moon's mad sons,

“Time will heal,” you said ;

“God cares for our dead—”

And down the lane to Hedgerley the woods flamed red.

When God's face dissolved in terror and pity,
When truth was as a ninepin in a crazy game,
And maniacs threw the balls, and gibbered in triumph,
And reason shrivelled up, like paper in flame,

“Look beyond,” said you,

“Where the light shines through—”

And from Penn to the Missendens the wild heath grew.

Time, no doubt, heals, and God, perhaps, cares ;
It may be there is light beyond the nightmare sky.
These are great thoughts to think, but for poor reeling brains
God, Time, and Light are too vast and too high.

Let me only know

How the beech-woods grow

All round Jordans, where the Friends come and go.

Let me hold in my mind

Things small, sweet and kind,

Apples, and the Chalfonts, and keep sane so.

REVUE

THE soldier groped in fog-bound streets: the world's
gray veils were dank as death,
And flapped and caught and choked his breath, like a
swinging line of new-washed sheets.
The town's known face was dipped and drowned and
swallowed in that frozen tide.
He'd lost his friends and way, and sighed. He was alone
in a world bound
By shadow-walls and empty night, a foolish maze without a
clue.
And even so was the world he knew, for too long emptied of
delight
And reason, and all but blind desire, and cold and jokes,
and frozen mud,
And lunatic chance, and pain, and blood, with, for heaven,
a bed, and drink, and fire.
And each brief to-day had no to-morrow, but was ringed by
walls close-set, opaque,
Which he had nor strength nor will to break. So now he was
walled by fog and sorrow.
And, drifting ignorant and blind, he stumbled into Leicester
Square,
And heard a burst of music there, and crossed to see if he
could find

REVUE

Comfort and warmth and a cheery show. Drawn like a moth
to where lights were gleaming,
He entered, and drank, half dazed, half dreaming, and sat
down in the pit, third row.
And there, bright-lit, was the mad unreason which was the
world, the world he knew;
For the wonderful people of revue performed the antics of
the season,
Leapt up and down and twirled about, waved legs and arms,
were bright and witty,
Made jokes and sang, were gay or pretty, did their strange
turns, ran in and out,
Each in his way and all ways mad, sublimely without cause
or sense,
Or pause, or laws, or consequence, like people (one thinks)
in Petrograd.
And that was Life, a wild thing spinning for a brief hour,
bedecked with lights,
Swung between two black hungry nights, which have no end
and no beginning.
And that was Time, a queer lit section of some monstrous
wheel all drowned and dim,
Whose eternal, churning turning rim flings up man in its
circumvection,
To do his turn and dance his dance and slip back into the
quiet sea
Of silence and eternity, which drowns life, time and crazy
chance

REVUE

In sleep, in sleep. . . . Our gracious King. . . . He squared
and sang. The show was through,
And his week's leave was over too. The fog closed round
him, a black ring
Round a lit stage. His step was light. He too was happy
and glorious,
Like the king, or the driver of a bus, because, he must go
and fight,
And die, perhaps, and freeze for certain, he was a gay star
of Revue,
With his comic, foolish turn to do. The fog came down like
an actor's curtain. . . .



ON THE LAND

1916

DRIVING SHEEP

THE green east flows with the tides of the rose
Between the bars of night, half-drawn.
The moon shines cold and faint on the fold
Where sheep glimmer, gray in the dawn.
Oh, thin like a dream their sad cries seem,
Caught high above time and space;
And old as the world, from out fleece dew-pearled,
Gazes each meek sheep-face.
Dazed with sleep, and numb, the sheep-women come,
And open the field gate wide.
The sheep surge out in an idiot rout,
Like gray foam swept on a tide.
Keep steady, move slow, we've three miles to go
To Grantchester from Chalk Field pen.
Herd them up all the way, lest some go astray,
Of our imbecile two score and ten.
Unreasoning, blind, each poor unhinged mind
Takes its thought from the sheep next ahead.
Through each hedge gate (if you reach it too late)
They charge, wild and pale, like the dead.
Their lilting bleat, their sharp, scuttling feet,
Are strange, strange as dreams before day,

ON THE LAND, 1916

And . . . counting the sheep . . . we sway . . . into sleep . . .
And trail along . . . foolish as they.

The wide tides of gold surge, quiet and cold;
The green west turns deep blue;
The moon's worn slip very soon will dip,
Like a pale night-bird, from view.
There seems no sound in the world all round
But of horn feet and quavering cries
In the young, cold hour. . . Like flame, like a flower,
The sun springs, huge with surprise.

BURNING TWITCH

THE twitch is gathered in from the plough-lands,
And forked up in heaps, to dry.
It has lain there against the June burning,
And to-day the white clouds fly
Scudding in shreds from the west wind,
The roads are swept by wings of dust,
And we kindle the twitch as the wind wills,
And burn it as we can and must.
It smoulders, and crackles, and darkens,
And sulks between gust and gust;
But when the blue smoke drives drifting
Straight into our crying eyes,
We fork flame from bonfire to bonfire,
Before the windy blazing dies.

ON THE LAND, 1916

Twitch is like souls in hell torment,
For it burns, but it never burns out.
There is always some twitch left over,
Though we, like the devil's rout,
Run with our forks round the charred heaps
To prod them and turn them about.
You may be quite sure, though the wind blows,
And your stoking be ne'er so deft,
When farmer drives round in the evening
He'll be finding some twitch left.

Our dim eyes are blind with crying,
Our feet wrenched by baked earth-clods.
The farmer talks of St. John's fires:
They may be St. John's, or God's,
Or the devil's, for all we are caring;
We would light them to any saint who
Would keep the west wind blowing
Till all the twitch burns through.

The twitch is gathered in from the plough-lands,
And burnt up on midsummer day.
But hell fire blown by wings of angels
Would not burn all the twitch away.

ON THE LAND, 1916

HOEING THE WHEAT

WHEN the sun looked over the Gog Magogs,
Unblinking, round, and gold,
We were hoeing through the Nine Wells field,
In wet wheat and cold.
And now that he stands overhead
And pours his noon fire,
We still hoe through the Nine Wells field,
Twenty rows higher.

We hoe up thistles and dandelions,
And all the plantain brood,
And sometimes by mischance we hoe
A swathe of People's Food.
The sun beats down unpitying
On bent neck and head;
Our shoulders ache with chopping out
The thistles from the bread.

The monkeys live contentedly
On nuts from the trees;
The fiercer beasts eat lesser beasts,
And honey does for bees.
The red cows chew the grass uncooked,
And horses like it dried,
The merry dog eats what he finds,
Without toil or pride.

ON THE LAND, 1916

The other beasts eat gladsomely,
Like saints in the south;
The earth's a table spread for them,
They live from hand to mouth.
But man alone, oh, man, alas!
In his insatiate greed,
Must break and cut the earth to bits
Before he can feed.

With all the fruits of the woodland trees
Ripening in their season,
And eggs of birds, and honey of bees,
And nuts, within reason,
And little beasts a-running round,
All ready for the pot,
You'd think man would be satisfied—
But oh, he is not.

I wish I were a rabbit, hid
In a green lettuce bed,
Or a little ass who does not mind
Thistles with his bread.
I wish I were a sheep, to munch
Where green grasses grow,
Or any kind of animal
Who eats, but does not hoe.

The sun drops behind the Gog Magogs,
And we drop our hoes.

ON THE LAND, 1916

We've murdered docks and dandelions
Down fifty scorched rows.
For one thing we give thanks to heaven,
As we drag home aching feet—
Along with the docks and dandelions
We have slain some wheat.

SPREADING MANURE

THERE are fifty steaming heaps in the One Tree field,
Lying in five rows of ten.
They must all be spread out ere the earth will yield
As it should (and it won't, even then).

Drive the great fork in, and fling it out wide;
Jerk it with a shoulder throw.
The stuff must lie even, ten feet on each side,
Not in patches, but level—so.

When the heap is thrown, you must go all round
And flatten it out with the spade.
It must lie quite close and trim, till the ground
Is like bread spread with marmalade.

The north-east wind cuts and stabs our breath;
The soaked clay numbs our feet.
We are palsied, like people gripped by death,
In the beating of the frozen sleet.

ON THE LAND, 1916

I think no soldier is so cold as we,
Sitting in the Flanders mud.
I wish I was out there, for it might be
A shell would burst, to heat my blood,

I wish I was out there, for I should creep
In my dug-out, and hide my head.
I should feel no cold when they laid me deep
To sleep in a six-foot bed.

I wish I was out there; and off the open land:
A deep trench I could just endure.
But, things being other, I needs must stand
Frozen, and spread wet manure.

LUNCH HOUR

WITHDRAWN for a little space from the confusion
Of pulled potatoes littered on broken earth,
We lay in the shadowed ditch, a peaceful circle
Of food, drink, smoke, and mirth.

The smell of the ditch was hot and sweet, and heavy
With poppy flowers, and tangled with nettle-weed.
In the grass a cricket chirped his eternal question,
Like a thin tune on a reed.

ON THE LAND, 1916

Blue tobacco-smoke drifted and curled about us;
Its eddying wove for us a mystic screen.
The field and its littered trenches dropped, and shimmered
In the clear gulf between

Real and dream; the gulf where shadowless silence
Dwells, and beauty is strange, and thin, and far,
And the world is quiet and flat, as pictures woven
On old tapestries are.

So we lay and laughed in the breathless noon-tide.
Your laughter, and your faces, burnt with the sun,
Were as far and as near as heaven, and as mystic. . . .
And the lunch hour was done.

Stiffly we stooped again in the sun-baked trenches,
And flung the lifted potatoes into pails.
And the earth stood out once more in relief and shadow,
Wholesome, like fairy-tales.

RECOVERY

WHEN this so bitter tide
Shall turn and ebb to the waste whence it came,
The world, like a wrecked ship shorn of her pride,
A battered ship, tipped on a riddled side,
A shattered ship, shall ride
From storm to port, bankrupt of all but shame.

In that dark dawn all we
As lost mariners shall reel crazily
On a new earth, grown stranger than the sea.
As drowned men shall we come,
All pale, all sick, all dumb,
(But some, oh, some
Shall come not even thus, so dumb they be).

We'll have no words to string, no tales to tell
Of the unutterable
Black dreams dreamt in the drifting deeps of hell.
But little things of earth
Shall stab us through with mirth—
Street lamps, each like a new-sprung celandine,
White daisies and red wine,
And small wise stars that shiver and blink and shine.

RECOVERY

So, bankrupt of hope and blind
To faith and love, we'll find,
We, even we, joy in things small and kind.
Though it lie drowned, the world we dreamt we knew,
—Oh, though no dream be true—
We shall cry and laugh, as sailors and children do.

TO-DAY

MOONLIGHT

HERE'S the full of the moon, and a clear blue night,
Washed with gentle light, like a shimmering sea,
Like pearl-ivory, like a lily in June.

The moon breaks in like the cherry a-bloom
To my still blue room. In the silver stream
I stir and dream that the guns begin.

But no guns shake the haunted, steep,
Frail walls of sleep. . . . Caught by the power
Of the silent hour, I turn and wake.

How quiet, how dumb . . . like an empty stage,
Or a smooth white page where no words are,
Or a bright-lit bar where no men come.

The wan world waits in the radiant tide. . . .
But the wild things that ride in a clear night sky
When the moon climbs high are beyond dream's gates.

And the goblin maroon is an echoed blast
From an evil past, and no flames flare
Down the sky's lit stair but the fire of the moon.

THE ADVENTURERS

STRANGERS from foreign lands
Walk in our land to-day.
They have come from far away,
Venturing, roving bands,
With laughter careless and grim and gay,
And hard, brown fighting hands.
They have known distant lands.

They seem as their fellow-men.
Hodge ploughs the loamy rows,
Sign babbles of silk hose,
Hugh drives a caustic pen,
Bill softly through houses at midnight goes,
Cracking the tills for gain . . .
They are just like other men.

They smile, with watchful eyes.
Their faces are quiet and lean.
You would scarcely guess they had seen
Strange things under strange red skies.
But now and again you may surprise
A hint that glints and dies
In their careless, watching eyes.

THE ADVENTURERS

They are peaceful, gentle, tame.
They drive the bus or quill
With careless, careful skill.
If they be blind, or lame,
They grope with an oath and a jest until
Sleep takes them; and sleep's the same
For wild hearts and for tame.

But wonderful tales they tell.
They have seen the bright stars shine
On the tombs in Palestine.
They have watched the Struma swell
Between dead Greek cities, and drunk red wine
In the inns of France, and of hell.
(There are tales they do not tell.)

They have stepped from a wilder age,
Remembered now as a dream.
Adventurers all they seem,
Buccaneer, knight and page,
From an old world drowned by time's washing stream.
Danger's their heritage.
They are sons of a desperate age.

FARMER'S BOY

IT is a naked country, without trees;
Scourged by winds from the seas;
Bald and bare;
Harsh with sounds that drive like stones through the air. . . .
(They do say
There were forests here once on a day;
But the great wars stole them away.)

It is a tilled country, without dreams,
And everything that seems
Is really so.
No wavering hints of doubt glint and go, . . .
(They do tell
Of queer elves who used here to dwell,
And who fled before the guns of hell.)

But when I walk at noon upon the bare,
The beaten ridge, where
The grass grows,
Where once, they say, the pines climbed in rows,
I do hear.
A singing like to harps in my ear,
And like a ship at sea the wind goes.

LONDON AT NIGHT

HOW brief time ago we nightly trafficked heaven,
Scanning the planets seven, and flinging up the skies
Bright ghostly arms of spies, white as snow!

Lest any fearful things should ride beneath the moon,
We closely did commune with the pilgrims of the sky,
Till earth's self seemed to fly, on black wings.

But since the set of Mars we have veiled the face of night;
We walk bemused by light, and have lost heaven's stair,
And the great booth's gaudy flare blinds the stars.

CAMBRIDGE

IN the quiet town of Cambridge
Two peoples shall meet.
They shall look strangely each at other.
The very tread of their feet
As they pass along the street
Shall show of which camp they are,
Tell whether they come from schoolrooms,
Or from countries far.

You shall know them by their faces;
Some shall be hard, and brown,
With keen eyes scanning distances,
As they walk about the town.
And strangely the light gown
Shall flutter from shoulders square,
And the cap shall sit curiously
On close-cropped hair.

You shall know them by their habits;
For, when the nights are bright,
The half of them shall leave their beds
And sleep in the moonlight.
But the others shall spend the night,
With thanks to God, in bed.
They have had too much of sleeping out
With the stars overhead.

CAMBRIDGE

They shall speak kindly one to another,
Across gulfs of space.
But they shall speak with alien tongues,
Each an alien race.
They shall find no meeting place,
No common speech at all;
And the years between, like mocking owls,
Shall hoot and call.

ANY DAY

MEETING AT JORDANS

IF you sit very still through meeting-hour,
And stare on the brick floor,
Or look up through the latticed window
At the beech-stems four,
With the sharp holly twinkling about them,
Or out through the wide oak door

To where the wind stirs in the brown woods,
And the shy squirrels are,
Your mind will become like the wide door,
And swing, swing a-jar,
And strange things may enter in,
From near and from far.

The ways of the world, the roads of heaven,
The steep lanes of hell
(And the quiet paths of the dim gray land
Whose name I cannot tell,
But it marches just beyond the bounds
Of thought . . . I know it well . . .).

MEETING AT JORDANS

The roads all circle about, twisting,
The people on them hide.
Sometimes they draw near, in a dim hour,
Like fish on a dawn tide,
But, finding no way to enter in,
Out again they ride.

But where they see an open door,
Or the least crack at all,
They float and drift down the gray roads;
You may hear their thin, small
Voices crying each to other,
Like owls at nightfall.

They drift, a motley rout of shadows,
Drawn, as pale moths to light;
They speed from the lands of good and evil
Down the steep roads of day and night
(And from the nameless waste country
Just beyond sound and sight).

You shall hear, if you listen very quietly,
And sit quite still in your seat,
You shall hear, above the whisper of the beech-woods
A confused patter of feet
Running from out three hidden countries
To where the roads meet.

MEETING AT JORDANS

And this little brick-floored farm-house,
So old, so full of grace,
Brooding and still in the brown beech-dell,
Is a fearful meeting-place;
For it holds heaven, and it holds hell
(And shades from the verge of space).

And when Friends, meeting, set ajar
Doors, without latch or key,
There slip in, without leave of them,
Both friend and enemy.
(And the wandering hosts of them that dwell
Where the bounds of the soul be.)

While Friends sit dreaming quietly,
A bitter fight is fought
By two armies in that still parlour,
In hate locked and caught.
(But no war is waged by the people
On the grey rims of thought.)

There's a battle round each open door
For the right to enter and dwell;
And you shall not know if heaven prevails,
Nor yet if hell.
(But there is a folk which always wins,
Unarmed, invincible.)

• • • • •

Come out, come out from meeting-house;
The doors are shut again.

MEETING AT JORDANS

You may hear the red squirrel chattering,
And the kind greetings of men.
(Is it dry leaves that whisper lightly,
Or the patter of rain?
Or startled rabbits that rustle and run
In the woods by the lane?)

REVENANTS

AS a lost and lovely island in a dim sea rides,
So the world turns and spins among pale waste waters,
And tumbles and spills its gay sons and daughters
To sink or to swim in the outgoing tides.

Tumbles them and spills them and calls them again—
"Do ye sink? Do ye swim? Does the sea drown our crying?
Shall our laughing and sighing not draw a replying,
As the moon draws the lunatic tides from the main?"

So we call, as the cuckoos call on Whitsun day,
From woods where the beech buds are pink like roses,
And the blossom's like snow in the orchard closes. . . .
Never did you hear so sad, or so gay.

As the moon drags the waters up the shifting sand,
Whispering and hushing and slurring and crawling,
So the great waste seas draw near for our calling,
And whisper and slide up the sun-sweet land.

The moon turns her tamed tides home at her will:
But these seas mind not the moon nor her brother. . . .
The island will drown in the salt sweet smother
Of waves that surge over it, and over it, till

REVENANTS

The green woods are marsh lands, and no man will know
The land from the water, the living from the dying,
For our calling and our crying will draw a replying,
(Hear the waves' thin sighing, "Let go, let us go! Do not
call us so!")
And the bounds of the earth will dissolve and flow.

VIOLETS

"SEE now," said she, "that you follow in an hour."
"How shall I know to find the way?"
"At each turn to take I shall drop a blue flower,
So. Now you'll not go astray."

She was gone so quick, so quiet was she gone,
That the man thought "Perhaps she was a dream."
And the streets roared by, and the hour crawled on,
And the man prayed "Let her be a dream."

If she were a dream, he muttered as he went,
There would be no blue flowers lying.
Sharp to the right a small street bent,
And a violet lay there, dying.

Violets are dropped by any wind of spring,
Flung from the light skirts of chance.
There lay another at a left turning,
(And he envied the cold lords of France.)

Doors in a row are like January trees,
Baffling, blank, inscrutable. . . .
How could he know (if he would) which of these
Blind things was the gate of hell?

VIOLETS

Like blue ink splashed on a newspaper,
So a spilt pool of violets sprawled
Over fog-grimed steps. (Oh, he could not err.)
From a basement a lean cat miauled.

He would be shut in a house full of cats,
Full of eyes, full of flittering wings,
Full of crafty smiles. . . . and whispers. . . . and bats. . . .
And the devil knew what worse things.

How a pull-bell clangs when it rings!

(Violets blink with secretive blue eyes
From the cold depths of slime-green caves.
Of world-old terrors violets are wise.
Violets spring out of graves.)

THE POND

WEED-BOUND, green as grass, the pond lies,
With a crazy, hole-riddled tin
Battered and broken, riding ship-wise
On the water's warm green skin
That bears, like a floor, the weight of June.
And the elder-trees stoop round,
Heavy with sleep, and still as noon,
And sweet with blossom, and bound
In dreams. And strangely each small thought
And each word spoken near
Like a fly in a filmy web is caught
And held; and you shall hear
Echoes, whispers of passion spent,
Of strange things long since said,
Prisoners now in the still dream-tent,
With the old tears one time shed.

Even so in the far years will men know
How you and I now lie
By the green pond's rim, and even so
Hear our thin words drift by,
Like pale moths fluttering to and fro,
Blind, in a mist-bound sky.

THE POND

Oh, lest of our incommunicable
Passion and pity, they
Weave idle dreams and tales to tell
Through some slow summer's day
We'll whisper not: but we will keep
Quieter than noon is long.
We will be still, more still than sleep,
Lest our weak words do us wrong.

BAFFLED

WHEN the still fire burns like roses
In the cavernous, empty night,
Through the small silent hours that watch
From lamp light to dawn light,
We lie upstairs, a-sleeping deep,
But in the house below
The puzzled tenants, blind and shy,
Creep to and fro.
They are holding whispered conclave
Together down there;
You may hear a sudden footfall
Crack on a stair,
Or a window opened soft and quick,
As if someone were
Seeking a clue to the strange house
In the wide night air.

For they are baffled, strayed and lost,
And the whispered things they say
Are puzzled echoes, murmured o'er,
Of the words we said by day.
They touched the books that we laid down,
With groping, blind-man hands,

BAFFLED

As travellers who stray, sighing,
Lost in strange lands.
They know not what the curious house
Holds for their good or ill;
It is a maze without a clue,
So dark, warm and still.

* * * * *

And they are you and they are I;
And while we lie sleeping,
Ourselves, bewildered by ourselves,
Go blindly creeping
About the house we know by day,
The things we love well,
Finding them fearful, far away,
Incomprehensible.

* * * * *

We wake upstairs: the morning fills
The still house with sun.
Away out of the clueless maze
Soft feet run.

DUST AND DUST

LIKE an army of the pale dead rising,
Torn from earth's grasp, the driven dust
Leaps up at my heels, whispering hoarsely,
And dances in the cold June gust;
And dances with the eddying elm-pods:
One might think it some strange last day,
When the blind dead, torn from earth, revel,
And flutter cold hands at play.
I could think that a legion of wan dead men
Were following me, ghostly and gray,
Bitter-breath'd, to hold and choke me:
And "Dust comes to dust," they say.
Their dry fingers, goading me and stinging,
Prick over my cold skin, and creep,
Gritting harsh on my tongue, and they whisper
"Earth shall soon be earth's to keep."
I could think, in a world full of dead men,
That I am as a dead man too,
Fleeing from my blind phantom brothers—
"Dust—are we dust? So are you."

Dust chases dust, to have and hold it;
With the dead chestnut flowers I run,

DUST AND DUST

A driven drift of dust among my brothers,
And they and I are even now one.
Like a blown lamp the spirit's flame flickers,
And, dust-choked, desire dies.
Dust and dust we drift, dancing together
On the wind from out the dust-gray skies.

THE PASSPORT

NOW the formless takes form, and the shadow takes
dust,

And the spaceless takes place, and time has beginning,
And you're flung through pain's gates on a crazy ball spinning,
And you sprawl, all amazed, on its crust.

As a little rat caught in a trap you'll be.
You've been decoyed to a world full of danger.
Like travellers' tales, and strange to the stranger,
Will be the droll shapes that you'll see.

They'll litter the earth, and drift round the sky,
Droll painted shapes, so foolish you'd wonder.
They'll lie in your road so you'll stumble and blunder,
And you'll break your shins and heart, and cry.

Through a world so littered, so sad and so gay,
What shall you take for your lunatic travelling?
And what shall help you to any unravelling
Of the threads that bind and choke your way?

Faith wilts in the quiet of the cold dawn hour;
Courage endures not in the face of to-morrow!
Peace may not live amid such joy and sorrow;
Dreams shrivel up like a flower.

THE PASSPORT¹

Truth is an heir with never an estate;
Wisdom will not serve, in a world without reason;
Love's red blossom blows but for a season,
Hope breaks, beating on a gate.

Then what's for your pack, and what gift shall it be?
You shall fare on your wandering way with laughter;
This shall be your pass through the maze and after,
Strayed child of eternity.

How full of munching mouths it is, and bright with strange
eyes,
This incredible earth, with its dreaming and eating!
It shall be for you a fair, where you'll dander round, greeting
Each side-show with shouts of surprise.

With its queer painted beasts, two and two, side by side,
(And little beasts plenty) all gay and all crazy,
'Tis like Noah's ark, adrift on a lazy,
Uncharted, horizonless tide.

There are men as trees walking, pink, covered and prim
(Or none of these three, but full of like passions);
There are things with four legs, or none, after their fashions,
And fishes and ships all a-swim.

There are men dug in holes, like the bear in his cave,
With fierce toys of steel, spitting death at each other.
At the call of the tribe brother murders his brother,
And tumbles himself to his grave.

THE PASSPORT

It surely is a marvellous, unprecedented star,
With its loving and hating, its killing and dining,
(Precariously lit by the other stars' shining)
And its queer talk of near and far.

What merry and unhappy and amazing live things,
All meeting, all parting, all chattering together,
Then suddenly dead. What extraordinary weather!
What statesmen, what gods, and what kings!

I suppose if I could tell you of all you will find
You would not believe me. How should you be knowing
Of words made with air, and of things to eat growing,
And of beauty, like a flame, to blind?

* * * * *

So you'll laugh, so you'll live, so you'll die when you must,
For what is the world but for living and dying?
And what fills the earth except laughing and crying?
Laugh, then, until dust goes to dust.

THE GATE

THERE is no smell of dust
On the road that leads to the farm,
But the bitter breath of the woody must.
(The red round moon very soon will thrust
Over the long hill's arm.)

I shall come, at the wood's end,
To the cart-track over the hill;
And the open hill is a kindly friend.
(Over my head the birch-trees bend,
Silver, and grave, and still.)

At the wood-road's end is a gate;
And (though there is no one there)
They who have passed through it dark and late
Say it creaks and groans, as under a weight
That is heavy and ill to bear.

The path twists so suddenly
That you cannot see far ahead.
But when you have come to the old thorn tree
(I am close to it now) then you may see
The gate, with its broken tread. . . .

THE GATE

With a hand pressed over each eye
Some men have pushed through blind . . .
But then should I surely run mad and die
If I was touched, as I stumbled by,
By a hand reached out behind. . . .

* * * * *

They found him running in the hill country,
Full many a long hour's journey from that place.
No tale he told, but gibbered crazily,
And ran and ran, as he would win a race.

And the moon had dried his tears upon his face.

AT THE FORGE

RIDERS liting loosely
Are comely to the eye;
A brief while they tarry,
And then ride by.
The road is no giver;
Of her the wise men say,
"Whate'er the road shall bring to you
The road shall take away."

Thudding down the gold way
(So thick the beech leaves lie)
Into the sea country
My friend rode by.
I had no greeting of him;
He won no speech of me;
I shod his bay mare silently;
He rode towards the sea.

Chill winds creep at twilight
From the sea lands, and sigh,
Questioning, questioning,
"Will he ride by?"
The road joins men for pity
(Blind foes, that erst were friends),
And straight, for anger, carries them
To earth's remotest ends.

TO THOMAS

AN EASTER ADDRESS

THOMAS, the wind sings up the lane,
And Easter Day comes back again,
With the palm breaking to silver bud,
And lilting bells, and wet, brown mud.
Since this is a blessed holy day,
Shall you and I go out to play,
And run together and be gay,
Forgetting what you never knew?
Oh, to-day I will know no more than you,
Who only know that the world around
As sensed by smell, by sight, by sound,
Is a most happy hunting-ground;
Who find by the wayside as you go
All you need or desire to know,
Enough of joy, enough of woe,
To feed your life, without questing after
Other people's tears and laughter,
Dead yesterdays and dim to-morrows,
With their distant guns and shells and sorrows . . .
Well, all this shining Easter through,
Thomas, I will be even as you.
You shall lead and I will follow,
Down into the beech-grown hollow,

TO THOMAS—AN EASTER ADDRESS

Where bluebells splash their pools in May,
And primroses gleam on Easter Day.
Oh, beech-stems that grow all together,
Catch a knack of the soft gray weather:
Strangely they melt and cloud together,
Till lo, their clouding weaves a spell,
As if the things that do there dwell
Should look out, whispering. Who may tell?
(Straight bluebell stems that stand together,
Hold this knack of the gray mist weather,
For they, too, palely, cloud together.)
Twisting and dim through the blue haze,
Green with young buds these April days,
Run the magical, still wood ways.
With lure of rabbits and all things sweet,
To dim worlds lead they straying feet.
Thomas, make pause, for here we stand
Upon the bounds of fairyland.

* * * * *

But little pause you made, my dear,
For the stir of a rabbit caught your ear,
And you became a tawny flash,
A leap, a scuffle, a yelping dash.
Your way is settled, beyond doubt.
Oh, lightly you run in, run out,
While I, divided, stand without.
Oh, Thomas of the eager heart,
Following all things that up start,
It may be dogs and men must part

TO THOMAS—AN EASTER ADDRESS

Upon the edge of fairyland,
Wherein you run, whereout I stand.
If I should enter now with you,
And play there all this Easter through,
I might forget the world's a place
Where I must run a strenuous race,
And make my mark, and use my wit,
And earn my bread, and do my bit.
I might forget that I am human,
An earnest, grown-up, working woman,
Writing books and reading news,
Thinking thoughts and holding views,
Meeting friends and talking sense. . . .
If I should climb over that fence,
And spend the morning and afternoon
In budding woods, till the Easter moon
Peered in on me, a golden eye
Swinging low in a sea-green sky,
And the dim paths turned from brown to black—
Should I as I went in go back?
Or should I come out a little mad,
Having torn all the sense I had
To fragments on the blossoming thorn?
Should I come out as I was born,
Ignorant, careless, without desire,
Except for food, and drink, and fire,
And sun, and flowers, and sleep, and play?
Well, this would do for Easter Day.
It is quite suitable for Sunday,

TO THOMAS—AN EASTER ADDRESS

And not amiss for Easter Monday.
But Tuesday I must work again,
And meet strong women and good men,
And feign sense if I have it not,
And give the goods I have not got,
(Or shall not have if I enter there,
And live like a wild beast in his lair.)
And men will guess the secret ill
I bear in my heart, all hid and still,
And know that, hide it as I will,
I really am an imbecile.

* * * * *

So, Thomas, am I held in doubt,
One foot in and the other out.
So, while you play your doggish play,
I waste not only this blest day,
But squander all my life away,
Upon the bounds of fairyland.
Choosing nor woods nor road I stand,
And, loth to trust myself to either,
I am a denizen of neither.
Oh, well you may look back, my dear,
Wondering why I linger here,
With the path to follow running clear—
Most clear for you; but you're not human.
You are a dog, and I a woman.

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